THE NORTH WALK MYSTERY

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"FROM CLUE TO CLIMAX."
"THE LAND OF THE CHANGING SUN."
"ALMOST PERSUADED."
"A MUTE CONFESSOR."
ETC. ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER I.

Miss Hastings waked with a start. She found herself trembling. She had an idea that some unusual sound had roused her. She sat up in bed to listen. Then she heard a voice. It was old Mr. Benton in his room adjoining hers. He was speaking in a loud, angry tone.

Miss Hastings rose, thrust her feet into slippers and put on a wrapper. She was vaguely frightened and yet hardly knew why she should be so. She turned up the gas, which had been burning low, and approached the partition between her room and the old man's. Now she could hear more distinctly. Mr. Benton seemed to be angrily upbraiding some one. Miss Hastings opened the door leading into the corridor, and the voice of the old man became more distinct.

"You are no child of mine from this day forth!" she heard him cry. "I shall disown you tomorrow! Get out of my sight! To think that you"—

The door of Mr. Benton's room was suddenly slammed, and Miss Hastings shrank from the crack through which she had been peering. Then she heard footsteps pass her door and descend the front stairs.

Miss Hastings sat down at her table, took up a book and tried to read, but found herself turning page after page without recalling a word she had read. She could hear the heavy tread of the old man as he walked to and fro in his room. What had happened? What was about to happen? What had been going on all that week between her friend Alice Benton and her father? The old man had treated Arthur Montcastle, a guest like herself, very rudely and had since been taking his meals in his own room to avoid meeting him. Besides this he had quarreled constantly with Alice and his son Ralph about trifles ever since Miss Hastings arrived, a week before. It had made her feel very uncomfortable, and she would have gone home but for her sympathy for Alice and the fact that Ralph had asked her to remain longer.

Old Benton's walk had ended. Miss Hastings hoped he had gone to bed, but just as she was about to undress herself she heard his step and the rattling of his doorknob. He was leaving his room. Miss Hastings again peered cautiously into the corridor. She saw the old man, dressed as he had been all day, go into the laboratory which adjoined his room on the other side. Looking out on the lawn below, she saw a bright light streaming from the window of the laboratory and knew that he had lighted the powerful electric lamp which hung in the center of the room. Now and then she saw his gigantic shadow on the lawn as he moved about. What could he be doing there at such a late hour? She looked at her watch. It had run down and stopped at 11, but she thought it was at least two hours later than that. Suddenly the light left the lawn. Then she heard Mr. Benton close the door of the laboratory and descend the back stairs leading to the garden.

Miss Hastings decided to go to bed. She was angry with herself for being so unreasonably nervous. She had unbuttoned her wrapper when—

"Crack!"

It was a loud, clear report like that of a revolver.

Miss Hastings' blood ran cold. She conquered an impulse to scream, deliberated a moment as she stood quivering in the center of the room, then jerked the old fashioned bell pull. One minute, two, three, ten minutes passed. No one came to answer her ring, and there was nothing to indicate that the report had roused any one else in the house.

Miss Hastings did not want to run the risk of making herself appear ridiculous in the eyes of the rest of the house party, so she began to try to persuade herself that the report was made by some explosive with which old Benton was experimenting. What could be more natural, since he was given to such things and had just left his laboratory? She sat down and tried to calm herself by using her will power.

Half an hour passed. It expanded slowly into an hour, and yet Mr. Benton had not returned to his room. Miss Hastings' fears were now increased tenfold. She was sure she had done wrong in not rousing the house at first. She drew the sliding bedboard in the floor and several times. Then, getting no response, she decided to wake some one. Mr. Stanwood, a guest of the house, roomed across the corridor. She went to his door and rapped.

She knew he was sleeping soundly, for it was several minutes before she heard him rise. He opened the door slightly.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"It's I, Mr. Stanwood—Miss Hastings," she explained apologetically. "I—I heard a loud report in the garden about an hour ago. It sounded like a revolver, and as Mr. Benton—Mr. Jacob Benton—went out about that time and has not returned I was afraid something might have happened to him, some burglar or"—

"Oh, I presume not!" said the young man lightly. "It may have been some one shooting at cats. They have been very noisy in the neighborhood lately."

"I—I don't think it was that," said the young lady, "and really I am so nervous that I should be very grateful if you would get up and see about it. I have rung several times, but the servants seem not to have heard."

"Oh, certainly!" exclaimed Stanwood. "I'll be ready in a minute."

She was waiting for him, her head enveloped in a shawl, when he emerged.

"I believe I'll go down stairs with you," she said. "The others must be up, for I think I heard voices outside. I don't like to be left alone up here."

"You are nervous," replied Stanwood. "Come on, then; we'll soon clear it up."

She followed him down the carpeted stairs into the large, dark hall below. He turned on the electric light. No one was in the library or the adjoining drawing room, but low voices were heard outside. Passing through the sitting room, which lay beyond the drawing room toward the rear, they met Mr. Montcastle and Miss Alice Benton entering at a door that opened on to a side veranda. Both of them were dressed as if they were prepared for a journey.

"Hello!" cried Stanwood. "What's the trouble outside?"

"Trouble?" echoed Montcastle. "I—I don't know. What do y-you mean? The fact is, Miss Benton and I"— His words failed him. He fumbled with the buttons of his ulster and stared at them through the semidarkness. Miss Benton leaned on his arm, put her handkerchief to her face and was silent.

"The report of the revolver, or explosion, or whatever it was, in the garden," said Stanwood. "Didn't you hear it?"

"No," cried Alice, uncovering her face. "What—who heard it?"

"I did," answered Miss Hastings. "It must have been an hour ago. It sounded as if it came from the garden down toward the north walk."

"It may have been nothing worth bothering about," said Stanwood.

"Hello!" cried Stanwood. "What's the trouble outside?"

"Montcastle and I will go down and look around if you will remain here."

For a moment no one spoke as they all followed Stanwood out into the yard through the door by which Montcastle and Miss Benton had just entered.

"Come on, Montcastle," proposed Stanwood. "We might as well investigate and have done with it."

"Oh, no; don't leave us!" cried Miss Benton, leaning on Miss Hastings. "I am afraid I am going to faint. Something has happened."

A window sash was raised in Ralph Benton's room up stairs, and he looked out.

"What's the matter down there?" he asked.

"Oh, brother, something must have happened in the garden!" replied Miss Benton. "Agnes heard the report of a revolver."

"Agnes—Miss Hastings must have made a mistake," said the young man slowly. "When did you hear it?"

"About an hour ago," replied Miss Hastings. She was wondering why his voice sounded so strange to her.

"Wake papa," Alice Benton called up to him, "and come down. The gentlemen are going to search the grounds. Oh, I wish we didn't live so far out! I haven't seen a policeman near here in a month."

The window sash fell with a crash. Ralph Benton had disappeared.

"Your father," Miss Hastings explained to her friend, "went down the back stairs just before I heard the report. He has not returned, and that is the reason I became so anxious."

"About an hour ago, did you say?" asked Alice Benton.

"I think it was about that time."

Miss Benton looked at Montcastle.

"Did you see him?" she asked. "I thought perhaps"—

"The governor is not in his room or in the laboratory," Ralph interrupted as he came across the veranda. He wore a light overcoat with upturned collar, and the rest of his attire bore evidence of his having hastily dressed.

"Miss Hastings thinks the report came from the direction of the north walk," said Stanwood. "It is no use looking elsewhere just now. Come on, Benton. Leave Montcastle with the ladies."

The last words came from the speaker after he had disappeared in the shrubbery among the shadows of the tall trees.

Ralph made a step or two in the same direction. Then he seemed to change his mind and instead walked down to the fountain in the center of the grounds.

Miss Hastings, who was looking at him wonderingly, saw him rest his hands on the edge of the basin and look down into the water. Presently he stood erect, turned and slowly came back toward them. Just then they heard a startled whistle from Stanwood.

Ralph paused while yet several yards from the others.

"He must have made a discovery of some sort," he said. "I say, Stanwood, wh-what's the matter?"

Miss Hastings noticed that his voice seemed to break when he raised it in calling to Stanwood.

"Gentlemen, I think you'd better come down here," came in a guarded tone from the searcher.

"Oh, no! Don't leave us!" cried Alice Benton. "I cannot bear it."

"What is it, Stanwood?" asked Ralph. "The ladies refuse to be left alone."

Stanwood came out of the shrubbery.

"Something awful has happened," he said, looking at Miss Benton. "Be prepared"—

"Father!" gasped Miss Benton.

Stanwood hesitated and glanced questioningly at Ralph.

"Out with it," said Ralph, turning his face toward the house.

"I found your father," said Stanwood. "He has been murdered."

"Are you sure it was he?" asked Ralph.

"Quite sure. He is lying under the large oak in the middle of the north walk."

Miss Benton's head sank to Miss Hastings' shoulder, and she uttered a low moan. Suddenly she raised her head and stared at Montcastle questioningly.

"I don't believe it," said Montcastle. "I shall go and see."

"Hold on!" The command came from Ralph. "I presume Stanwood knows what he is talking about. We must be careful and not do anything which would stand in the way of police investigations. Many a valuable clew has been lost by too many people being on the spot before detectives arrive. We will notify the authorities at once. He'll have to lie where he is till"—

"Oh, brother," protested Miss Benton, "can't you have him brought into the house?"

"He is quite right," Montcastle put in. "If your father is dead, it would not help matters to move him. You ladies ought to go in."

"Oh," cried Alice, "I cannot bear to think of it, and you and I"—

"Hush!" interrupted Montcastle in a cautious whisper. "Remember your promise." He drew her arm into his and started toward the house. The whispered warning escaped Miss Hastings, for Ralph was telling Stanwood what ought to be done. Stanwood agreed to stand guard at the end of the north walk, while Ralph escorted Miss Hastings to the house and informed the police.

"You see," Ralph explained, "I want the thing sifted to the bottom in the best possible way. I—I want to know who did it and bring the criminal to justice. Am I not right, Stanwood?"

"Quite," returned Stanwood. "I presume you will employ Minard Hendricks. He is wonderful. Nothing escapes him."

Ralph hesitated. Miss Hastings saw a strange expression cross his sallow face.

"I—I don't know," he stammered. "Of course—well, I presume the police will know if it is necessary."

"I should have Hendricks by all means," Stanwood advised. "I see by the papers that he is in the city. He is undoubtedly the finest detective in America."

Ralph gave his arm to Miss Hastings. "All right," said he, "if the police think it necessary. I—I don't want anything left undone."

CHAPTER II.

At 3 o'clock that morning Minard Hendricks, the detective, called at the apartments of his friend, Dr. Lampkin, the hypnotic physician. He roused the janitor and went hastily up to his friend's bedroom.

"Wake up, old man!" he called out as he rapped loudly.

The doctor opened the door and looked into the dimly lighted corridor.

"Oh, it's you, eh? What's up? Is the house afire?"

"You are funny when you are only half asleep," Hendricks jested. "Let me in. We mustn't wake the entire block. You were yelling at the top of your lungs."

"Was I? Your loud rapping made me think the building was tumbling down."

Hendricks entered and closed the door after him.

"Why, it must be—what time is it?" asked the doctor, fumbling among the bric-a-brac on the mantelpiece for a match.

"Three o'clock," answered the detective. "Put on your clothes. I want your assistance again."

"What's up?"

"Another murder."

"Where?"

"East Orange, N. J. It's only half an hour from here. I want to catch the first train on the other side; boat leaves pretty soon."

Dr. Lampkin began dressing hurriedly.

"Who's the victim?"

"Old Jacob Benton, a wealthy inventor. You've seen his name mentioned in connection with electric experiments and photographic improvements. That's all I know about him. My information was in the shape of a telegram from the chief of police over there. I understand Benton was having a sort of house party, and there will be a good many people to take in all at once. You have helped me often with your impressions of character. I seem to be lacking in that sort of judgment. What I get is always through external evidence."

"Bosh! I can't help you in the least."

"Get into those duds," said Hendricks. "I have no time to argue with you. If it hadn't been for you hypnotizing Whidby in the Strong murder case, I never should have got on to the track of Farleigh. You are too modest, my friend. You are a gold mine."

Dr. Lampkin darted into a curtained alcove and presently reappeared fully dressed.

"I'm ready," he said. "I'd rather watch you unravel a skein of tangled circumstances than to hypnotize millionaires at a fortune a sitting, and if I can help send your euphonious name on down to posterity and up to prosperity as a great and shi"—

"Let up!" Hendricks cautioned as he took hold of the door latch. "Don't let the entire building know we are out after game. We might be troubled with a score of reporters over there."

They succeeded in catching the desired boat and train and in half an hour were approaching the Benton homestead in the outskirts of East Orange. It was a great, two storied brick building, with a gothic roof and an L. In front was a wide, well kept lawn, and behind stretched quite an extensive piece of woodland.

Hendricks waved his hand toward the rear.

"A good, bang up place for a killing," he said, as if talking to himself.

"It happened outside of the house, then?" said Lampkin.

"So my telegram tells me, and back there."

The gray of early morning was just beginning to show a suggestion of yellow. The dew upon the grass looked hard and white like frost. From the street the two men could see that the front part of the house was lighted. They had reached a small gate opening into the central walk, that led to the front door, and Lampkin put out his hand to open it.

"Wait," said Hendricks, his broad brow wrinkling thoughtfully. "The carriage gate down there at the corner of the lot shows indications of not having been closed carefully. The gardener who has kept this lawn and shrubbery in such perfect trim would not go to bed leaving a gate like that."

"You have the eye of an eagle," laughed Lampkin.

"Come on," said the detective, leading his companion down the sidewalk to the gate mentioned. He stood for a moment critically studying the walk and the gutter at the edge of the street; then he smacked his lips thoughtfully and opened the gate.

"I thought you usually went directly to the scene of a murder and traced developments from there," remarked the doctor.

"I make a habit of never allowing a thing to pass me till I see a logical reason for it," Hendricks responded. Then Lampkin heard him utter a low exclamation as he bent close to the drive and carefully sighted over the surface of the grass to the house. "I say, doctor," he said in a tone of satisfaction, "do you see nothing in the appearance of that grass worth noting?"

Dr. Lampkin imitated the detective in stooping and sighting over the lawn, and then, with a smile of defeat, said:

"I must acknowledge I do not. I am not a cow or a horse, and therefore"—

Hendricks interrupted him with a good humored laugh.

"Don't you see that the dew glistens white and silvery like a broad sheet of frost over the lawn?"

"Of course. That's plain enough."

"Well, don't you see two vague parallel lines about five feet apart, where the dew has been disturbed, leading from this point to the front door?"

"Yes, I do now—carriage wheels or a wagon."

Hendricks stooped and examined the grass, plucking blades of it and holding them close to his eyes.

"Hansom cab," he said, drawing himself up, "and rubber tired."

"How do you know that?" asked the doctor.

"Iron tires would have bruised the grass. I can tell it was a hansom because the tracks were made by a two wheeler. Four wheels would have left four tracks where the cab turned on to the drive right here."

"I see," exclaimed Lampkin in a tone of admiration. "What do you make of it?"

"A note," said Hendricks. He smiled at the very weakness of his joke, but his smile immediately gave place to a serious, studious expression.

"Whoever it was drove in that way." Hendricks indicated the same sort of

"Oh, it's you, eh? What's up?"

tracks along the fence which curved toward the house near the center walk. "I can see that by the way the horse's hoofs were turned. The driver came in on the grass and went out on it to avoid making any more sound than was necessary."

"You think so?" said the doctor in wonder.

"Yes," Hendricks returned. "You see, fresh sand has been put on the drive, and cab wheels would make a crunching sound on it."

"That's a fact, at any rate," replied the doctor.

"Come on," said Hendricks, starting across the lawn between the cab tracks he had first pointed out. "I see something up there."

He was several yards in advance of the doctor and suddenly stooped and began to examine something on the ground. When Lampkin came up to him, he saw that it was a notebook bound in calf. Hendricks stood up, leaving the book on the grass.

"I presume," he said, smiling, "that you would pick it up at once, doctor—that is, if you wanted to know what it contained."

"Why not?" asked Lampkin.

"Because it is not my method. It must be done with a good deal of care."

Hendricks picked it up cautiously and turned it over. "See," he said, "it is wet on the under side and comparatively dry on the side that was uppermost."

"I notice that," said Lampkin.

"It was dropped several hours after the dew had begun to fall; otherwise it would have been dry beneath and wet on top. Presumably it fell from the cab, since we find it between the tracks of the cab, which went out after the dew had fallen."

"It looks that way," said Lampkin, "but it would never have occurred to me to think of it."

Hendricks held the book toward the light in the east and examined the cover. "I see a monogram here," he said, "'A. M.' We must find out to whom it belongs." He turned the pages. They were all blank, and the book contained nothing except a clipping from a newspaper, which had been thrust into a pocket inside the cover. "The owner of it evidently left here in a cab some time last night," said the detective as they started on.

As they neared the house a man and a woman came from the hall on to the veranda. The latter was wiping her eyes, and the man was evidently trying to console her.

"Daughter of the murdered man or a guest," muttered Hendricks. Reaching the steps, the detective removed his hat and bowed. His studious glance was on Montcastle rather than on Miss Benton when he spoke.

"Minard Hendricks is my name," he said. "I have been notified by the police that my services as a detective might be needed, and I came out as quickly as possible."

The girl released the arm of her companion and approached the edge of the veranda.

"I am glad you came," she said. "It was my father. I am Miss Benton. Two policemen are out there waiting for you. This is Mr. Arthur Montcastle."

Hendricks extended his hand to Montcastle. "I picked up something belonging to you, Mr. Montcastle," he said, showing the notebook.

Montcastle stared first at the book and then at Hendricks without replying.

"You dropped it from your hansom as you drove across the lawn last night," continued the detective.

Montcastle and Miss Benton glanced at each other inquiringly. It seemed to Lampkin that a look of vexation crossed the face of the former.

"I—I suppose it is mine," said Montcastle. "Let me see it."

Hendricks deliberately put it into his pocket. "Excuse me," he said. "I should like to keep it a little while."

"You are welcome to it," said Montcastle. It seemed to the doctor that he spoke in a certain tone of defiance as he turned into the hall and disappeared.

"I presume you want to see the spot," said Miss Benton. "You must go round the house that way and then down the last walk on the north side."

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Fogs and Gas Burners.

That a London fog deprives coal gas of 11.1 per cent of its illuminating power will not surprise many of us, but that the searching light of an incandescent burner is robbed of as much as 20.8 per cent of its efficacy under such circumstances is certainly astonishing. The reason Professor Lewes gives for this phenomenon is that both the spectrum of the incandescent and the electric light approach very nearly that of the solar spectrum, being very rich in the violet and ultra violet rays, and it is precisely these rays which cannot make their way through a London fog. This is the reason why the sun looks red on a foggy day. The violet rays are absorbed by the solid particles floating in the aqueous vapor of the atmosphere, and only the red portions of the spectrum get through. The old argand burner is much more successful in battling with a London fog than either of its more youthful and fashionable rivals.—Scientific American.